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"I'm Niu Voices": Selina Tusitala Marsh's Poetic Re-Imagining of Pacific Literature

This article analyzes Selina Tusitala Marsh's collection of poetry, *Fast Talking PI* (2009) in the context of the poet's call for the "Pasifikisation" of New Zealand literature. It focuses on three poetic acts: the naming and unnaming of the Pacific self, the recovering of past and present Pacific female voices, and the remythologizing of figures and places. These acts locate Marsh's poetry within the decolonizing paradigm of postcolonial literature and exemplify the postcolonial categories of hybridity, syncretism and transnationalism.

In her chapter in Mark Williams' *A History of New Zealand Literature* (2016), titled "'Nafanua and the New World': Pasifika's Writing of Niu Zealand," the poet and critic Selina Tusitala Marsh calls for the "Pasifikising" of space and place through the re-imagining of Pacific and Western culture. To her mind, "Pasifikising" involves literary acts ranging from the "renaming, reclaiming, and rewriting of literary territories to the remythologizing of cultural figures" (360). The programme she maps out belongs to the "decolonizing" paradigm of postcolonial literature and thus continues the struggle of Pacific literature for recognition and "literary decolonisation" that started with Albert Wendt in the 1970s.

Marsh's collection of poetry, *Fast Talking PI*, released in 2009, had already fulfilled part of that programme. Its very structure reveals a poetics and politics of reinventing a Pacific self. The book brings together thirty-two poems divided into three sections: the first, "Tusitala," explores how the personal may be political in a Pacific context; the next one, "Talkback," is the poet's version of writing back to the empire, and finally, "Fast Talking PIs," in which the acronym PI stands for Pacific Islander, creates a gendered and racial counter discourse in the present.

Gender and racial identity politics are at the heart of Marsh's reimagining of the Pacific, but although such politics is still relevant today, it has become outdated as a term since its heyday in the 1970s, and needs to be reinvented to account for the complexities of group belongings. In particular, identity politics entails such pitfalls as the reification of identities, as it is premised on categories that exclude "others." Thus, it leaves aside hybrid people: they become lost between two cultures, like Marsh herself who has been accused of being "not brown enough" by members of the Samoan community.[1] Like Albert Wendt in his seminal essay, "Toward a New Oceania," Marsh emphasizes diaspora against the purity of the race, that is the heterogeneity and diversity of Pacific Islands people and cultures.

Reimagining the Pacific through poetry brings further challenges. Like African-American poetry, Pacific Islands poetry exists within cultures of stories, where storytelling is part of every social encounter. The PI artist is a storyteller rather than a poet, fulfilling a certain role within a community. Marsh, whose middle name is "Tusitala," that

1. In an article paying tribute to the legacy of Albert Wendt, Selina Marsh explains that she nearly abandoned her doctoral thesis on five Pacific Women Poets at the University of Auckland after being challenged by members of the Samoan community over her right to conduct such research. Albert Wendt gave her the support she needed at the time. See Teaiwa and Marsh.

is "teller of tales," reconnects the poet and the storyteller in one single figure, "the calabash breaker": "They sail the notes of our songs / stroke the lines of our stories" (*Fast Talking PI* 19).[2] Inspired by black feminist poetry (Alice Walker) and the Māori movement Mana Wahine, Marsh tells her story and that of Pacific Islands women through poetic forms that engage with both popular and abstract poetry, drawing from slam and militant poetry as well as metapoetry.

My aim in this article is to show how *Fast Talking PI* carries out the pasifikation of poetry without reifying identities and harking back to a mythical Samoan past. This entails celebrating cross-cultural mixedness and multiple identities as well as adapting the tone of militant poetry. Thus, the use of "voice" and "authority" implied by the necessity of breaking through gender and racial stereotypes is toned down by the presence of a highly self-reflexive "I." Marsh decentres the "I" by multiplying the imaginary locations of its enunciation and its figures, displacing the centrality of the English language by inscribing alterity in it to avoid mimicking the Western "I." Thus, her transnational, syncretized poetics also fits in the other paradigm of postcolonial literature: hybridity. Finally, abstract, modern poetry, with images paralleling and reinforcing the aural component, creates a sense of Gestalt, both visually and aurally; rather than *fagogo* itself (storytelling), it is the "the colour of fagogo" (41) that the poet intends to convey. In this article, I will analyse three acts of poetry in Selina Marsh's collection: naming, rewriting the past, and remythologizing, arguing that decolonizing and celebrating hybridity can be critically conjoined.

The Poet as "Calabash Breaker": Breaking Stereotypes and Renaming

Selina Marsh's poems are grounded in a specific sociocultural context: the economic and symbolic domination of Pacific Islanders in New Zealand. The Polynesian community is the third most important ethnic group in New Zealand. In a society that is officially bi-cultural, this community has suffered from negative stereotyping by the dominant group and is viewed as a "problem population." People from the Pacific islands, especially Samoa and Tonga, came to Aotearoa in the 1960s to fill low-skilled jobs. In the 1980s, with the recession, they were no longer needed, and the National government launched a campaign to stem immigration. Polynesians became a socially and economically disadvantaged group with a marginalized status. Unlike the Māori who are positioned as "indigenous" in the national discourse, people from the Pacific islands are constructed as a "migrant" minority group, for whom the preservation of identities and languages is considered a lower priority, whereas Te Reo Māori is an official language. In this section, I analyze how Selina Marsh uses her own name as a starting point for a poetics / politics of naming, unnaming and renaming the Pacific self.

In an essay on Pacific Islands woman poets, Marsh wrote: "In poetry the personal has political possibilities as oppression is exposed and critiqued" ("Theory 'Versus' Pacific Islands Writing" 351). The essay is preceded by a poem entitled "Naming Myself: Reflections on Multiple Identities" in which the poet tries to "word the spirit of brown" in "theory" and "creativity." This poetic and political act recalls Black American feminism, and in particular Audre Lorde's practice. In *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, the African-American poet and feminist mixes autobiography, history, myth, and poetry to

2. All subsequent quotes will be given in parentheses in the text.

reinvent herself. The name Zami becomes a renaming of the self as "Black lesbian." Like Audre Lorde, Marsh sees the relationship between names and identity as a way to shape the self, and an act of self-empowerment. She brings the world, through language, into an alignment with the new self and locates this practice in the gap between theory and creativity.

"Tusitala," Selina Marsh's maternal name, thus occupies a central position in the poet's identity and discourse, reflecting its core position in her family name. "Tusitala" means "teller of tales" in Samoan and thus reconnects the poet with Samoa, which she calls her "sacred self" in "Naming Myself." But a name cannot be reduced to one single signification. The first poem of the collection, "Googling Tusitala" (13), makes use of the metaphor of the search engine to explore the scattered, manifold and multiple denotations of "Tusitala" and "bring" them into a unique space. The poem is based on the anaphora of the verb "bring" which stands alone on a line; this device shapes the whole poem and underlines the act of "coming to a place." The ability of the search engine to draw links with other people is explored, and can be also linked with Pacific Islands cultures where genealogy is paramount, and an individual only exists as part of a group.[3] Thus, the ritualistic act of reciting the Whakapapa serves as a framework for a poem in which she names the first settlers' ships that arrive in New Zealand in the first half of the nineteenth century, starting with a question that the Māori asked when the ships arrived: "Has The Whole Tribe Come Out From England?" (54). In the endnotes of the collection, she specifies that her great-great-grandfather was on board one of those ships, the *Aurora*. The question and the reciting of names are also used to indigenize the English: "ask Charlotte Jane, Randolph, Sir George Seymour" (54).

Naming is a highly symbolic and political act, for as Bourdieu notes, "There is no social agent who does not aspire, as far as his circumstances permit, to have the power to name and to create the world through naming" (105). Since the Greek classics, lyric poetry has played on and reinforced the power of naming. In his essay "Approaching the Lyric" Northrop Frye claims that when we read lyric, "we are psychologically close to magic, an invoking of names of specific and trusted power. [...] Verbal magic of this kind has a curious power of summoning, like the proverbial Sirens' song" ("Approaching the Lyric" 35). Selina Marsh's poetry often taps into this power of invoking names. In "Circles of Stone" she calls upon the major poets of her generation – Sia Figiel, Karlo Mila, Tusiata Avia, Alice Te Punga Somerville, or Teresia Teaiwa – in a ceremony of fertilization and growth. The performance of these ritualistic acts enables the poet to metaphorically throw seeds to grow a new literature. The trope of the "calabash" (gourd) is used as a symbol of fertility.

For all the selves with stigmatized identities, renaming begins with unnaming as the poet singles out the false or other-defined selves at the source of symbolic domination. In New Zealand, Pacific Islanders have stigmatized identities: they are sometimes given derogatory names, such as "coconuts," "brownies," "PI," and so on. Pacific Islanders are also treated as one homogeneous category, although the poet is careful not to single out specific communities (Samoan or Tongan) so as not to stress national identity, which is a source of racism. Pacific Islanders themselves treat the "half castes" (*afakasi*) as "outcasts," and it is the poem "Outcast" that concludes the collection (76).

3. Sia Figiel's novel *Where We Once Belong* (1996) features an episode in which the teenage characters recite names and origins of family members as a game and a social ritual.

The longest and eponymous poem of the collection, "Fast Talking PI" (67-73), spectacularly performs the renaming of Pacific Islanders and half-caste people. Like the poets of the Beat generation or the negritude movement, Marsh is devoted to the spoken and performed aspects of her poems. "Fast Talking PI" evokes slam poetry in its construction, rhythm and theme, even though slam is not its only cultural reference. First, the poem was modified after its performance as a slam poem. The line "I'm a slamming poetry PI" (72) was added. Second, it is supported by sound and music: the whole collection was first published in a hybrid format since it was accompanied by an audio CD. Most importantly, "Fast Talking PI" has a highly politicized content, drawing upon racial, economic, and gender discrimination as well as current social trends for subject matter, as is often the case with slam poetry.

Like the staple slam poem, "Fast Talking PI" consists in a declaration of marginalized identity through the anaphora of a formula: "I am a … PI." "Fast Talking PI" is a list poem, chanting and asserting multiple Pacific Island identities. The opening lines reveal a mixture of derogatory and positive assertions:

> I'm a fast talkin' PI
> I'm a power walking PI
> I'm a demographic, hieroglyphic fact-sheetin' PI

Although this declaration of marginalized identity may be read autobiographically at times, through the references to academia for example, it also denotes a wider engagement with the world. "I am" is an assertion of identity that is meant to represent the diasporic Pasifika community. In an essay titled "Pasifika Poetry on the Move: Staging Polynation," Marsh wrote that the poem "counters the limitations of homogeneity implied by 'nation' by being 'every person,' existing simultaneously within and beyond it, and celebrating it" (207-8). Through the multiplicity of utterances, the performed poem creates a space where dominated identities are embodied and made visible. Thus, the celebration of a wide array of Pasifika identities produces a community during the performance and gives birth to a counter public sphere, that is, in political scientist Nancy Fraser's formulation, "parallel discursive arenas where members of a subordinated social group invent and circulate counter discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (81).

To achieve this, the poem confronts the stereotypes of racial and hybrid identities. For the poet, the acronym PI is still "tainted with colonial derogatory undertones" (Marsh, "Pasifika Poetry" 198), whereas Pasifika is a transnational term adopted to convey a sense of Pacific-centred perspective. Therefore, the negative stereotypes attached to Pacific Islander need to be counteracted, with a rhetoric of incantation and excess that breaks through its negative connotations. The anaphoric repetition of PI, along with the use of racist and sexist terms, creates multiple word play and rhymes which neutralize the negative effects of these words and destroy the fixity of identity stereotypes. The abundance of terms prevents the reader from pinning down a specific identity for Pacific Islanders, and the anaphora conveys the idea that the characterization can never be exhausted. This is further underlined when the poem is actually performed: in performance-oriented poetry, dancing, moving and chanting help emphasize meaning.

In the poem, Marsh also addresses the issue of being half-caste: she uses contradiction, mixing antonyms, negative and positive terms to emphasize a happy multiplicity rather than a conflicted duality. She is both one and its opposite:

I'm a melting pot PI
an homogenous PI
I'm a skim milk, green top, fat free heterogeneous PI

I'm a bit of both PI
A chameleon PI
A hybrid, mongrelized, self-satisfied PI

This celebration of multiple / hybrid identities reflects social trends. New Zealand social science research has shown that "it currently seems more acceptable to acknowledge being 'afakasi Pasifika than to acknowledge being of *Pākehā-Māori* heritage [...]. In addition, while 'afakasi identity in the islands is overlaid with ambiguity, in New Zealand, particularly with younger participants, a multi-ethnic identity now tends to be more readily acknowledged and affirmed" (Agee and Culbertson 62). Being Pasifika is a source of pride, while dual ethnic identity is viewed suspiciously.

For its effect, "Fast Talking PI" relies on performative speech acts, according to Austin's linguistic theory. By repeating "I am," you become that identity. But the poet also recognizes the limits of performative acts: the following poem "Acronym" (74-5) is a response to someone who does not know what PI stands for. The poet invents other meanings for PI, ironically mocking her own self by calling the speaker an "aretologist" (a praiser of the gods), thus emphasizing the fundamentally playful and fictive nature of her poetic acts.

Selina Marsh also considers renaming as a transgressive (and aggressive) practice which involves strong, fearless and outspoken personalities. Thus, the poem "Calabash Breakers" (19) has a direct and simple form, with three- or two-word lines: an anaphoric listing of mythical heroes and literary figures "with rebellious blood" (19). The ultimate Pacific Island artist is a "calabash breaker," someone who transgresses "boundaries" to "catch bigger suns" (19). The following poem, "Hone Said" (20), alludes to another "calabash breaker," the Māori poet Hone Tuwhare and the conflict of interpretation surrounding one single but crucial line from one of his poems: "the only land I am / is that between my toes" (20). "Hone Said" is a metapoem about the right to reimagine a poem. The speaker chooses to read "am" rather than "have," thus stressing identity over possession. The poem also reasserts the importance of the dispute over land in postcolonial New Zealand, which is ironically overshadowed by a metaphysical discussion (as between academics).

Renaming is all about repossessing language, so that the self and language correspond with identity. As Bhabha writes, "the question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a self-fulfilling prophecy – it is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image" (45). Acknowledging multiple identities is essential to avoid reifying and fixing categories in the act of renaming. To be truly effective, however, naming and renaming must also address the source of symbolic domination: the legacy of colonization in the present.

Gender Politics: Reclaiming HerStory and Her Body

Pasifikizsing literature implies reclaiming the past, that is uncovering lost names and histories, but also offering an alternative to white history by debunking the myths surrounding colonial discovery and settlement. Rewriting the past is a paradigmatic post-

colonial tale and one of the main strategies permitting colonized people to create their own counter discourse. In the second section of the collection, entitled "Talk Back," Selina Marsh offers a poetic variation on the "write back" paradigm: she strategically shifts the emphasis from written to oral, as an acknowledgement of traditional cultures but also as a gesture of gender and racial politics. The trope of "voice" becomes central in the formulation of a powerful counter discourse, while the poet also addresses the sexualization of the Pacific female in popular and high art. In this section I will show how Marsh uses "voice" as a fiction and trope to deconstruct colonial and postcolonial discourses and deploys figures of speech to ventriloquize voices. There is a contrast between the silencing and invisibility of Pacific Island women in history and the ubiquitous images of Pacific Island women which are used to objectify their bodies.

The need for Pacific Islanders to write their own histories and question the European construction of their past has been acknowledged by writers, especially Albert Wendt. Marsh's poem "The Curator" alludes to Wendt as "The poet from Pasifika" / "blurring black white history often" (59). Rewriting the past is an empowering / emancipatory political practice through which the subject can retrieve her autonomy and agency for the representation and construction of new identities, and make "dissonant, even dissident histories and voices" heard, as Bhabha puts it (6).

But the role of native women in colonization and decolonization tends to be ignored by anti-colonial historians, creating a new exclusion and leaving women voiceless. In her seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has argued that the subaltern woman under imperialism is allowed no discursive position from which to speak. She notes that "one never encounters the testimony of the women's voice-consciousness" (297), concluding, "There is no space from where the subaltern (sexed) subject can speak" (307). At first glance, Selina Marsh seems to echo this position with the collection's epigraph: "All the dark women of history have lost their tongues." Moreover, Marsh stresses the double subjection of colonized women by the colonial power and by patriarchal power in the domestic sphere and in society. For Marsh, the recovery of the female voice, a key issue in identity and feminist politics, is linked to the breaking up of images surrounding the Pacific Islands female body.

Thus, "Two Nudes on a Tahitian Beach, 1894" (49), a poem which conjures up Paul Gauguin's famous painting, offers a carnivalesque reversal of roles of the painter and the "object" of the painting. Marsh plays on the double meaning of the verb "draw," thus combining attraction and visuality in one single notion. The poet denounces the colonial gaze on the indigenous female body, using imagery suggesting rape: "strip me bare / assed," "turn me on," "shove a fan." The violence of the language is a response to the violence of the act. But here the bodies offered for visual inspection are given a voice. Through the poetic device of prosopopoeia, the lending of a voice to what would ordinarily remain voiceless, the poet "talks back" to the centre, giving a voice to the silenced women, passive objects of the painter's gaze, and briefly becomes "the other." Opening with the line "Gauguin, you piss me off," the speaker mimics an authoritative voice which contrasts with the passive bodies represented in the painting.

Reinscribing women as agents in colonial history strategically counters the passivity attached to the figures of Pacific women during colonization. The poem "Nails for Sex" (47), for example, is an allusion to an episode in the colonization of Tahiti, when the survey ship *Dolphin* called at an island in Tahiti in 1751. The local women met the sail-

ors and exchanged nails from the boat for sex. Here, the poet challenges the romantic myth about Tahiti and women being accommodating for sex by showing that women acted subversively, causing the ship, as the vehicle and symbol of colonisation, to almost collapse. Another poem, "Mutiny on Pitcairn" (48), is a response to the better-known mutiny of the *Bounty*, and refers to the story of Jenny, who tried to escape from the rule of men. It is constructed on the anaphora of "I will build a boat" as the main rhetorical device. "Mutiny on Pitcairn" highlights the resistance to the colonization of female bodies through the figure of Jenny. "Realpolitik" (51) evokes the sexual politics of colonization and mentions ironically the spread of venereal disease by sailors, debunking the romance surrounding the representation of the encounter. The poem is double-voiced as it quotes the explorer James Cook's diary. The extracts are interlaced with the speaker's comments, producing internal dialogization.

Unlike what some militant poets do, the poet does not equate voice with truth; rather, she emphasizes the fictional aspect of diverse discourses as a way of undermining their power. Voices are masks. Similarly, the power of images is deconstructed. Western representations of the Polynesian body are addressed through past and contemporary culture, in particular Hollywood films and iconography. Selina Marsh attacks the stereotype of the "dusky maiden," the PI woman as an object of Western desire, which started with the colonial encounter and continues with advertizing. The poem "What's Sarong with This" (55-8) deconstructs the fascination for the Pacific female body through images of the Pineapple Pin-up of the 1950s and Hollywood South Seas films, showing how body parts become commodities used to sell food and drink. The fetishization of body parts, which in Freudian terms is a perversion since it shifts interest away from the person, is also the cover for the fetishization of commodities in the Marxist sense. Women's bodies have acquired the status of signs and values in the postcolonial context that inscribes sexual desire within the discourse of economic power. The dislocation of the syntax, with the listing of body parts and passive verbs, reflects the dislocation and objectification of body parts: "clitt butt boobs plumped cupped and dished on palms" (55). Thus, Marsh continues the work of Sia Figiel in debunking past and present myths about the Polynesian female body and unmasking the voyeuristic activity of *Palagis* (white people) in relation to the female body.[4] In a line from the poem "Fast Talking PI" the speaker intertextually references Figiel's novel, *Where We Once Belong* (1996), among other Pacific Islands works, by asserting: "I'm where we once belonged" (72).

Remythologizing

"Demythologizing" and "remythologizing" complete the decolonizing of Pacific islands literature in Marsh's view. Remythologizing, however, is not a politically neutral act as it can lead to the reifying of the past or a culture. Myths can be empowering, but they can be repressive as well. For example, myths of motherland can be reactionary. Marsh's poetry keeps the function of the myth alive by mapping out new linguistic territories and reaching out to other worlds in a syncretic way. The poet uses myth to reimagine the past and assess the present differently, abandoning the insistence on the pain of the

4. See Michelle Keown's essay, "'Gauguin is Dead': Sia Figiel and the Representation of the Polynesian Female Body."

past. The poems "Afakasi" and "Not Another Nafunua Poem" are very representative of this reimagining, and fully demonstrate the possibilities for poetry to bring different worlds together.

"Afakasi" (16-8) belongs to the first section of the collection, "Tusitala." The word *Afakasi* is the Samoan translation of half-one. These two terms form the basis of the poet's identity, but *Afakasi* also refers to the whole Pacific community, as the mobility of the labour force throughout the region has contributed to making the population thoroughly hybridized. *Afakasi* and *Tusitala* are mentioned several times in the collection and foregrounded in the titles of respectively a poem and a section, revealing the necessity for the hybrid to explain who s/he is by telling tales about other times and places. In the poem "Afakasi," hybrid identity is evoked in terms of dislocation which, as the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* note, is where "the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being; the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 8-9).

"Afakasi" explores various ways of finding a place for the South Pacific people who left their islands for Aotearoa New Zealand. As such, it is an allegory of migration; each stanza represents a way of negotiating multiple identities in a new land. The poem alludes to the ambivalence of being half-caste in New Zealand, and the pain and joy of relocation through visually and psychologically split spaces. Spaces are physical (visual) as well as semiotic. Visually, each stanza is separated from the others like an island in the ocean while the overall rhetorical construction reveals the moral and emotional ambivalence of relocation: there are sharp contrasts between stanzas, with oppositions between movement / stillness, fullness / emptiness, darkness / light. These contrasts suggest all the ambivalence of mobility from success – "spaces filled with va" – to loss, represented by empty spaces with no light. Throughout the poem, techniques of creolization of English, mainly lexical, are used as metaphors for cultural contact, translation, transformation, and hybridity. Thus, the joy and pain of relocation are transmuted into hybrid language.

The poem's opening lines have an epic quality – "Half moons ago" – and announce the telling of a narrative and a grand gesture. The speaker assumes her role as "Tusitala," the teller of tales, the one who interweaves past and present in myths and performance. The second stanza evokes myth – "great deeds done" – but locates the major mythical events in the margins, outside the spatial boundaries of the poem: the greater deeds may be found in "marginalia," the place where everything can be rewritten or commented upon freely. Myths, therefore, can be reinvented from the margins.

"Afakasi" is a chronotopic poem, with space taking precedence over time; similarly, the narrative is replaced by a movement of forms in an abstract space: the poem finishes with an image that may represent the Pacific Ocean or a painting: "Some spaces are brown / some are blue." Thus, the poem composes a visual as well as an aural representation in the manner of William Carlos William. The dynamics of space are emphasized by visual images used to paint multiple ways of being in space, including "bodymind-maps movements" as migration can be traced on a tattooed face: "a moko mapping where they had been / and they were to go" (17).

Aggrandized hybrid identities are placed within the larger frame of Samoan and Māori myths, which become the framework for thinking through migration, but in a loose way. The poem is associated with the art of Fagogo, the telling of legendary tales

in Samoa, which are often accompanied by dances and songs; hence the reference to theatre in the poem, and to performance in the whole collection. In terms of Polynesian metaphysics, the poem is strongly predicated on the Samoan concept of *va*, which Marsh defines in her endnotes as "an interrelational space between people; between people and the environment" (80). *Va* is a key metaphysical concept for Pacific artists. For Albert Wendt, *va* is "the space between, the between-ness, not space that separates but space that relates, that holds entities and things together in the unity-in-all, the space that is context, giving meaning to things" ("Afterword" 402). *Va* is a way of thinking about self, identity and place which is central to the Samoan view of the world. With *va*, spaces can draw closer to one another and form relationships that enable the creation of identities. Consequently, spaces with no *va* are not spaces at all: the speaker also evokes the loss of the intergenerational identity, marked by emptiness and silence. A different spatiality emerges: the urge to affirm one's place (belonging), which can lead to a certain fixity of place and thought is replaced by acknowledgement of multiple related spaces through the concept of *va*.

The poet explores the Samoan and Māori conceptual spaces without reifying them, or fixing moral or religious values on them. The reference to *Pouliuli*, which is also the title of one of Albert Wendt's novels, exemplifies the flexible use of these concepts. Whereas Polynesian and Samoan missionaries cast *Malamalam* (Christian Enlightenment and knowledge) in opposition to the *Pouliuli* of ancestral Samoa (heathen, pagan, sinful or evil), in this poem, *Pouliuli* becomes the void to be explored and is reconnected with the Māori myth of creation: *Te Kore*. Above all, migration is not considered only in terms of loss. Even though there are unsuccessful displacements, there is no loss of culture. In Samoan, migration is *Malaga,* which refers both to travelling and the spiritual journey of being on earth: it has metaphysical attributes which extend beyond geographical displacement.

Thus, "Afakasi" expands on Wendt's vision of a new Oceania metaphysically and linguistically. The poem exemplifies what the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* call "hybridity in the present," that is, to "free itself from a past which stressed ancestry, and which valued the 'pure' over its threatening opposite, the 'composite'" and "replace[s] a temporal linearity with a spatial plurality" (35-6). "Afakasi" is an illustration of Marsh's cultural revitalizing, as she writes in her 2016 essay "'Nafanua and the New World': Pasifika's Writing of Niu Zealand": "through reimagining, writers activate the space of cultural memory, creating contemporary parallels with archaic initiatory elements, demonstrating that culture is dynamic and open, rather than closed and static – vital for Pasifikising space and place" (368-9).

Similarly, Marsh's treatment of Nafuana, the Samoan warrior goddess, does not necessarily entail unquestionably celebrating the famous figure. For Marsh, Nafuana is a key figure in the remythologizing of Pacific writing, because, as she argues in the essay quoted earlier, it gives a central role to women, and it is a resisting figure with a traditional backbone. But in "Not Another Nafuana Poem" (15), the speaker adopts a more reflexive, even ironic stance towards the "Nafuana" self. In this prose poem made out of a single unpunctuated sentence, the poet evokes the Samoan economy and the transfer of culture / economy involved in migration, resulting in a cultural tension. The new "re-imagined" liberated Samoan subject, Nafuana, who "rides the current of her culture in the new millennium with her electric va'a" (15), is contrasted with her

traditional sister who stays on the Island and performs the traditional female role of looking after parents, feeding and selling fruit in the market in a male dominated culture. The migrant is the one who "steals" from the culture. In this poem, Nafuana straddles two identities, the traditional and the new, "millennium" model which involves a form of transgression and rebellion against the community. If asserting oneself as an individual means differentiating the singular from the collective, this may be problematic in traditional Samoan society where "we" exists before "I." Sia Figiel explores a similar question in her novel *Where We Once Belong* (1996).

In *Fast Talking PI*, Selina Marsh re-visits practices of identity politics by multiplying poetic acts that enlarge, reach out, and engage in a non-essentialist way. She renames by breaking stereotypes and using them as counter-discourse, but also turns names into a celebration of multiplicity, and a way of finding her place in a "circle" of writers. Talking back to the centre means reassessing the role of Pacific women in colonial encounters, giving them a more heroic role. Finally, she reimagines territory and identity together in a hybrid space, where various forms of tradition and modernity are continuously at play, creating cross-cultural poetic rituals. The hybridity and decolonizing paradigms of post-colonial literature complete each other, and hybridity, which is often too broad and vague a term to characterize a specific voice, is recontextualized by the decolonizing perspective. As an academic and artist, Marsh also practises a way of rethinking the relationship between theory and art. For the poet, theory becomes a dialogue, while the aesthetics of straddling borderlands allows the academic to explore new linguistic territories and concepts. This way, she can indigenize theory and avoid the danger of theorizing PI women voices.

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